ranking official and not in a position to have had access to such secret documents, as Akçam notes (p. 43). With the help of carefully selected official reports, Akçam responds to Orel and Yuca’s argument on Naim Efendi’s identity and reveals how Naim Efendi might actually have had access to the documents in question.

In a particularly captivating part of the book, the author closely examines the encryption techniques applied to the telegrams in the memoir that were then used by Orel and Yuca to discredit the telegrams. Akçam delicately refutes this assertion by analyzing abundant data—a comparison of almost two hundred official correspondences during wartime—and offers material evidence that there are countless official cables written with the same encryption techniques as the telegrams in question. Moreover, he explains a highly complex subject in an uncomplicated way, allowing non-expert readers to engage with his analysis.

Akçam, by revisiting a decisive document, re-ignites an enduring and critical debate. Unfortunately, with a more than 100 pages long appendix of testimonies and telegrams, a 278 pages long text cannot cover such a controversial and vital topic. Therefore, Orel and Yuca’s theses on discrepancies of the dates and signatures on the telegrams remain unanswered at the moment. As a result, the critical task of thorough investigation of indecisive telegrams (better known as “official killing orders”) will have to be resumed by another study. Yet this thought-provoking book gives a fresh impetus to re-consider the historiography of the Armenian Genocide and further research the official documents and archives.

Berlin

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Recent years and especially the centennial of World War I and of the Armenian Genocide saw the publication of a flurry of new books on a variety of topics concerning the Ottoman Empire, ranging from general histories to those dealing with various aspects of the war and the genocide. Yet, there remained one major gap: the political leadership of the Ottoman Empire. Neither Talât Pasha’s nor Enver Pasha’s life have received recent treatments in books in any Western language. The last biographical book on Enver in a Western language was published in the 1940s in German.

Hans-Lukas Kieser now closes this gap with his long-awaited and masterfully executed Talât Pasha biography. In six chapters and a very readable text, Kieser reinstates Talât Pasha as a major statesman of 20th century European and world history. With this biography Kieser forcefully writes against de facto existing provincialization of late Ottoman history (at least internationally) by reconstructing Talât as a major figure of the time on the one hand and by reconstituting Istanbul as an important “diplomatic
hub,” as he calls it, for the first two decades of the 20th century on the other. Kieser strongly rejects the “triumvir view” on the Ottoman leadership during World War I. It was not, Kieser argues, the three Pashas together, i.e. Talât, Enver, and Cemal, who ruled the empire for the duration of the war. This characterization, Kieser argues, was true only for a shorter period of time. And it also was not Talât and Enver plus, in occasional alliances, other leading Young Turks, but rather, he contends, it was effectively Talât who ruled the empire.

The absence of books on leaders of the Ottoman Empire after Sultan Abdul Hamid II so far, the scarcity of in-depth studies on the period as well as books highlighting the German factor may have implicitly suggested a certain passivity of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Throughout Kieser shows how Talât and his colleagues made use of the alliance with Germany, internally and externally. Kieser furthermore convincingly shows how there had been choices in the execution of the war and in the empire’s dealings with Germany. Through the reconstruction of Talât Pasha’s life and his role, Kieser reinstates agency – however horrible and tragic the outcome of that agency – to the Ottoman Empire and its leadership. While the Armenian Genocide is given due attention, it does not overtake the whole focus of the book. Given Talât’s role as the author and prime mover behind it, this could have been a narrative and analytical problem, but Kieser finds a well-balanced and elegant solution. However, Kieser shows throughout how important the Armenian topic continued to be for Talât until he died. In many ways it haunted him, until it literally killed him.

Kieser explores Talât Pasha’s life through a well-thought-out mix of chronology and thematic discussions, thus beginning his narrative with the first chapter in 1915. Along the way, Kieser also compellingly maps the ideological world of Talât and the other Young Turks. Drawing on his own research as well as that of others, he identifies and reconstructs the various traumatic experiences of the Young Turk leaders and the Ottoman Empire that led them down a “demolitionist” path, as he calls it.

But demolition ushered into something new and Kieser goes beyond the view that Talât and his colleagues merely gambled away the Ottoman Empire.

One of Kieser’s central claims is that Talât was not only the one who dismantled “the Ottoman social fabric and thus the empire,” (xiv) but that he must be seen as “a demolitionist builder of a ‘new Turkey’” (p. 33). This surely will provoke much thought and discussion. He does so especially in the last chapter of the book, which covers the time from 1917 until Talât’s death in 1921. Going against the core tenets of Kemalist historiography (beginning with the Nutuk), this reconstruction of what Kieser calls “Turkey’s foundational history” (p. 415) is a major accomplishment of this book.

Kieser’s Talât biography will be of great interest to specialists and the reading public at large. Throughout the text, Kieser convincingly argues that Talât and his actions served as precedents for broader European and Middle Eastern history, from leadership styles to radical political solutions, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. This book